It was the biggest battle in the capital in years. On one side was TEA and its members, along with allies in county commissions, school boards and parent groups. On the other side were out-of-state special interest groups and, in the end, Gov. Haslam. Each side battled for every vote to pass or defeat vouchers. The future of public education in Tennessee hung in the balance, with folks back home saying “no,” and the dozens of high-priced privatization lobbyists telling representatives to vote “yes.”

In spite of spending millions of dollars to push unproven and dangerous vouchers into Tennessee schools, privatizers didn’t have the votes on the floor of the Tennessee House of Representatives. TEA’s vote count was right - our opponents did not have the 50 votes needed to pass the voucher bill.

For the fourth year in a row, Tennessee teachers, education support professionals and administrators were the force that kept vouchers out of our state by educating elected officials and communities on the dangers of vouchers. TEA members made thousands of calls into the statehouse more than 12 to 1 against vouchers, due in large part to TEA members statewide. Above, TEA members run a phone bank in Johnson City with Rep. Matthew Hill on the Saturday before the voucher vote.
ATTACKS ON TEA FROM OUT-OF-STATE SPECIAL INTERESTS CONTINUE

You can tell how effective TEA members are by the powerful enemies we’ve made.

Five years ago, some legislators and powerful out-of-state interests fed the light with tactics that left educators reeling. The latest attempt to weaken the association is to get legislators to pay TEA dues through payroll deductions—something that has been in place for decades and places no additional burden on local district or taxpayers. However, while they were successful in ending collective bargaining, TEA has become an even more powerful and vocal advocate for public education. Educators statewide are more engaged in the political process than ever before and are making sure that public education is in their state’s view in a way that has never been seen before. They are not taking their eyes off of this election and let some privatizers threaten our students and our schools.

TEA government relations team expects the attacks to keep coming, which means all Tennessee educators and supporters of public education must stay engaged. Members need to constantly call and email their legislators to let them know that the folks back home do not agree with what these out-of-state organizations are trying to do in order to sanction or derail education in Tennessee.

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Proposed BEP changes keeps pie growing, but some systems may lose out

The state’s funding formula for schools, the Basic Education Plan (BEP), is set for an update this legislative session. Governor Bill Haslam is proposing three key changes: Elimination of the Cost Differential Factor, a freeze and then phase-out of BEP 2.0, and a change in the way teacher salaries are funded through the BEP.

While the full impact of these changes is not clear, what is clear is that these new proposals will result in a significant increase in teacher pay for all systems. TEA supports efforts to lift all boats by way of teacher pay increases and we will fight to ensure that provisions are adopted that improve pay for teachers across the board.

The other changes certainly have implications for both rural and urban districts. As a result, Governor Bill Haslam is proposing a slate of changes to the state’s school funding formula, the BEP. While the full impact of those changes for districts and schools is not entirely clear, there is one positive development: The new law will mean more money to raise teacher pay at all levels across the state.

TEA has continuously pushed for a simple principle when it comes to teacher pay: When the General Assembly passes a raise, teachers should get that raise. Unfortunately, the state’s current funding formula, the BEP, was designed to phases out the BEP. When the General Assembly passed a raise in recent years, teachers typically saw increases of only one-half or one-third of the state increase. Just last year, the 4 percent increase in compensation funds from the BEP resulted in an average teacher raise of less than two percent across the state.

Now among, along the changes instituted with Governor Haslam’s $240 million increase in education dollars is an effort to ensure that pay raises from the state actually get to teachers paychecks. The proposed change to BEP teacher pay calculation requires that if districts aren’t paying teachers at the state average salary or above, they must use any new BEP instructional funds to provide pay raises. That will go a long way to ensuring that when the General Assembly passes a 4 percent raise for teacher compensation, most teachers actually see a 4 percent raise.

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Pushing for testing transparency yields results; Governor Haslam joins effort

Following the b Alexis Stokes, TSEA's staff lobbyist, explained that the issue of standardized testing was a hot topic among lawmakers and parents throughout the state. She said that the ongoing debate over standardized testing has brought to light many concerns about the impact such tests have on students, teachers, and the overall education system.

As the Tennessee General Assembly meets to consider education legislation, TSEA recognizes the importance of transparency in the testing process. This is exemplified by recent developments surrounding the Tennessee Ready Assessment (TNReady), a state-wide standardized test.

Last week, Governor Bill Haslam announced his support for increased transparency in the testing process. In a statement addressing legislators, Governor Haslam emphasized the need for greater accountability and oversight of standardized tests.

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Your voice makes a difference at the Capitol. If you haven’t already made plans to be in Nashville on Tuesday of your spring break, please register as soon as possible for Civication, a vacation combining vacation with civic pride in our profession. Your voice could be the pivotal point in protecting our payroll deduction and making sure vouchers stay out of Tennessee public schools.

Come to the Capitol to talk to your legislators and enjoy the great entertainment of Nashville! TEA pays mileage for any members who want to attend Civication during Spring Break. There is complimentary breakfast at TEA Headquarters in downtown Nashville, free parking, shuttle service to the Capitol, and House and Senate Education Committee meetings to see the Tennessee legislature in action!

If you live more than 100 miles outside of Nashville, TEA has a supply of pre-paid hotel rooms for members for Monday night (limited basis). Come to Music City, enjoy the city and have a successful and important Civication. Members who took part in Civication last year had a huge impact on the legislative success of TEA!

HURRY! SPACE IS LIMITED!

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